

Music students in the movies had Mr. Holland and his deferred opus. I was blessed with Mr. Higby.

On the first day of the semester he entered our high school English class cloaked in a black raincoat and wrote his name briskly on the chalkboard. He was dapper and dignified, with a closely cropped dark beard. When he turned to face us he slipped off his coat and folded it inside out. The lining was scarlet. Everyone gasped.

Mr. Higby's coat was a sign that we were going to be taken on a series of wonderful journeys. He was that best of teachers — demanding, fair, and original. We read *The Red Badge of Courage* and talked about what war really meant. We read *Animal Farm* and argued politics. We read *The Great Gatsby* and discovered the great American novel compressed into a bright, hard gem.

I especially remember a discussion of George Orwell's *1984*. At the time I was not impressed so much by the strange world Orwell gave us — and had no way of knowing that the real 1984 would be, in its own way, so much stranger — as by the sheer distance of the year itself.

I was young enough to assume I would live to see 1984, but at the same time it seemed impossible. I would be really old — almost 40 — and my parents would be in their 70s. Everything would be different, strange, unimaginable. I was unable to conceive of a world 20 years older.

Now, of course, 1984 has come and gone, and 16 years beyond that have passed. I don't know if Mr. Higby is still living. My own mother died in 1982, her complicated illness teaching me that the future is always ambiguous and it's wise to take it as it comes.

I learned from Mr. Higby that there is truth in any genuinely creative work. As a New Century's resolution, I hope once again to pick up the books that used to serve as guides for an uncertain life, and to write my own fiction. And I hope you will find in this first *Cal Poly Magazine* of 2000 some stories that will touch your imagination.

In addition to many alumni who are supporting the community and the university with their talents and gifts, we are profiling alumni and Cal Poly researchers who are moving inventively into the new millennium: an architecture graduate turned international musical performer; a husband-and-wife team who founded a San Luis Obispo company developing the next generation of movie film; professors and students who are lighting up plastics; and two teachers bringing high-tech careers into a junior high laboratory.

Mr. Higby, sitting on the edge of his desk with one polished loafer across his knee, would say that they all are a part of our common, mysterious future.

Vicki Hanson

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Editor



ON THE COVER

Alumna **Trudie (Morgan) Safreno (AGB '92)** and her husband, engineer **Ty Safreno**, co-owners of San Luis Obispo's Trust Automation Inc., are helping develop a film processing system that is

taking the movie industry on a quantum leap into the future and bringing film experts in droves to the Central Coast (see story beginning on page 8).
(Photo by Ron Bez)